



## GUIDELINES FOR VIDEO COACHING

Welcome to **Level Up** Video Coaching! I'm excited to be able to provide this service for students who are unable to participate in regular lessons due to distance or scheduling restraints.

I know that many students learn visually and that just the process of recording and watching film can make a powerful impact on progress. (Professional athletes spend HOURS reviewing footage of themselves to improve their game.) If you are a student of HorseSense Learning Levels, you can earn checkmarks for completed objectives using video and online discussion. This exercise may also help you become more self-directed and analytical in your routine riding. Let's get started together!

### PRICES:

1-20 minutes of video footage	\$25
20-45 minutes of video footage	\$40
45-60 minutes of video footage	\$50

*However much footage you send me, I will typically spend twice as much time on reviewing and critiquing!*

Online payment may be made via PayPal ([nsurusco@gmail.com](mailto:nsurusco@gmail.com)) or Venmo (@Nicole-Surusco). (My bank currently does not offer Zelle, but maybe in future!) You are welcome to pay on a different day than you submit your video, but video will not be critiqued until payment is received.

### WHAT YOU GET:

Each video submission will receive a written critique including observations on:

- 🐾 rider position and use of the aids
- 🐾 horse's movement, posture and mental state
- 🐾 execution of all specific exercises shown

As well as:

- 🐾 recommendations for follow-up rides, including complementary groundwork or conditioning routines
- 🐾 suggestions for specific exercises to improve both rider and horse
- 🐾 links to any videos, articles, diagrams or other visuals I think you will find helpful

My critique style is a "compliment sandwich" – even if I have LOTS of constructive criticism, the overall tone will be positive in nature. We are ALL, after all, a work in progress, and riding a horse should be a joyful experience!



## HOW TO SUBMIT VIDEO

There are several ways you can do this – however, I **strongly recommend uploading videos to YouTube**. If you have a gmail or Google account, you already have a YouTube channel free for your personal use, and you can download the mobile app to make uploading videos from your phone a breeze. Set your videos to “Unlisted” if you want them to be viewable to only a select audience.

This allows me to watch videos in slow-mo, compile playlists of your short clips, and download videos for off-line viewing. You can also include comments or notes for me in the description field. Simply send me a link once your upload is complete at [nsurusco@gmail.com](mailto:nsurusco@gmail.com), or text the url to 706-889-6453.

If YouTube is not an option for you, any similar hosting service works. You can send me video files directly via email or mobile. Be warned, I have not always had good luck with this – big file sizes do not always like to travel! In future, Levels students will be able to submit video and receive critique via a LearnDash course, but this is still a work in progress. 😊

## WHAT TO FILM

Ultimately, this is up to you! You might wish to include part or all of a training session, or clips of you and your horse performing specific exercises: lateral work, ring figures, patterns or tests, jump courses or grids, longeing, etc. Choose the element of your riding or training you think you need the most help with and we’ll go from there. I am happy to discuss possible film topics and angles prior to your initial critique, at no charge.

## HOW TO FILM

Video submissions do not need to be polished and edited. Background noise is also fine – I won’t pay much attention to audio unless instructed otherwise or I feel that I need to hear voice aids. (For example, if you submit a longeing session, I’ll listen closely for your vocal cues.) Minimal shakiness is appreciated but otherwise, no expertise or fancy equipment required. A smartphone or inexpensive camera works just fine. Let it run continuously or include multiple short clips in a single submission – whatever is easiest for you.

The important thing is that I can see you clearly. Please wear neutral clothing that I can differentiate from your horse and saddle – wearing all black on a dark horse makes it tough for me to evaluate your position, especially in low lighting! Avoid poofy jackets or baggy clothing. Contrasting polo wraps or protective boots on your horse’s legs can make it helpful to see lateral work, especially if left legs and right legs are different colors.

If your camera is stationary or does not zoom, ensure it is positioned close enough to the action to make out details. As a general rule, you are close enough if I can see the placement of the stirrup on your boot.



## HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO RECEIVE CRITIQUE?

The length of time it will take me to return your written commentary will depend somewhat on the timing/length of your submission and on the travel logistics of my current lesson schedule, but in general, expect all your feedback within 1-7 days. If Weird Life Stuff happens and I cannot turn around a submission within that time, I will contact you ASAP!

Please indicate how and where you would like to receive your written commentary. My preference is to send it in PDF format (for several reasons), so if you are unable to open or read these files, let me know.

## HOW OFTEN SHOULD I SUBMIT VIDEO?

Entirely up to you! You can submit videos weekly, biweekly, monthly, seasonally, annually – whatever you need. If you would like to receive video coaching on an ongoing business, just let me know and we can talk more about your goals and time frames. If you miss a “lesson” or need to film at a different time because of weather/scheduling conflict/act of God, no worries. The nice thing about video coaching is that it can be very flexible for both student and coach!

## A FINAL NOTE:

The video you share with me, whether edited or not, remains YOUR intellectual property. You retain all rights to it and can use it anywhere you like. Occasionally, if I see something really awesome, or something I think would be helpful for another student, I might ask you if you’d be willing to share a clip – but I will never share any part of your submission without your permission.

Let me know if you have any questions. I’m looking forward to watching you and your horse improve!

*Nikki*



# Level Up Instruction

SAMPLE VIDEO CRITIQUE FOR: \_\_\_\_\_ Nikki & Chase \_\_\_\_\_

DATE FILMED: \_\_\_\_\_ February 2017 \_\_\_\_\_

*Video runtime: 2 clips, totaling 9min, 20sec. Includes recent flatwork practice including walk/trot/canter/transitions on both reins, followed by 2'6" stadium jumping course. Horse has already been warmed up at all three gaits on long rein.*

## BIG PICTURE:

This is a well-thought out schooling session showing a logical progression from warm-up flatwork to jumping. I *really* enjoyed watching your stadium round – it was rhythmic and balanced, with the horse moving forward with impulsion. With the exception of one fence (I'm sure you know which one!!), you demonstrated a consistently correct jumping position with flat back, eyes up, and lower leg at the girth.

For this reason, I'm going to focus most of my commentary on the flatwork. Most of the suggestions I have for improving your ride on the flat will benefit the jumping as well.

## RIDER POSITION AND USE OF THE AIDS:

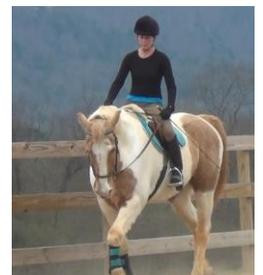
**Things you did really well:** sitting trot! Downward transitions! Folding through hips over fences! Your seat and leg are getting much softer and quieter, and Chase approves!



When you rewatch this video, pay close attention to the **position of your arms, hands, and wrists**. Notice how your elbows drift away from your body? This wide, open hand position is fine if you're working on a long or loose rein, but seems to be your default position throughout the ride – including focused moments where you appear to be intending to ride on contact, such as transitions. Since you specified that you warmed up on a long rein, I'm guessing you're aiming for working gaits here, and didn't realize how long these reins still are!

How is this rein length affecting you?

- 🐾 **It makes your contact with the horse unclear**, making your rein aids unclear.
- 🐾 **This is causing you to be quite busy with your hands.** Check out **0:58-1:04** and 4:25-4:35 in particular. See all the motion in your right elbow and hand? This is "noise" in your horse's mouth. Horses that feel this repeatedly tend to become dull and heavy at the end of the reins. They are less likely to open their throat and reach forward to the bit, which makes athleticism and balance suffer.
- 🐾 **It is probably causing you to round your shoulders and ride with crooked wrists.** Check out 6:16-6:22 in particular.
- 🐾 It is encouraging the horse to travel with his poll lower than his withers. More about that in the next section!



For all of these reasons, I would make riding with a **shorter, more consistent rein length** your **#1 goal** for your next few rides.



## Level Up Instruction

### HORSE'S MOVEMENT, POSTURE, AND MENTAL STATE:

The horse appears fairly relaxed and attentive in the work. He's stretching beautifully over his back, but there is often a lack of balance in his trot and canter, with his **weight falling onto the forehand** and an **overall stiffness to the gaits**. I know he's an older boy on joint support and this video was filmed on a cold day – but I also suspect that the **contact issues** mentioned above might be preventing him from moving freely through his body!

Think of it this way: **stiffness in the rider = stiffness in the horse**. Riding with your reins too long is causing you to contract the muscles in your arms and shoulders rather than keep an elastic feel. **Round shoulders also create downhill posture** in the rider, which creates downhill posture in the horse.



Will a better contact magically fix Chase's posture? It will definitely help. **Horses also need a lot of conditioning to carry their weight on their hindquarters**, especially if they've been moving in a downhill position for a while. You can start this process by practicing **lateral work** such as leg yield and shoulder-in and LOTS of **transitions** in your flatwork. Let me know if you need a refresher on aids and positioning for any of the lateral movements!

By the way, that one sticky line in your jumping round? Listen carefully at 8:32 – you'll notice Chase rubs the front rail of the first fence with his front legs. He appears to land heavily and lose impulsion, causing the long distance at the second fence in the line (and your turtle shell back as you try to stay with him!). Now rewind and watch the approach to the black gate again. See where your arms and shoulders are? Pause the video at each phase of his canter and notice the downhill tilt.

**A balanced canter creates a balanced jump.** Improving this weaker link in your flatwork will improve his jumping ability as well. 😊



# Level Up Instruction

## TRY THIS: SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR NEXT FEW RIDES

- 🐾 **Spend an entire ride with your reins bridged, or hold the rings of a snaffle bit along with your reins.** This will prevent your hand-widening habit from creeping in. If you feel like your rein aids are ineffective – your reins are too long!
- 🐾 Warmup at the walk without stirrups, focusing on **leg lengthening** and **hip opening stretches**. **Walk/trot/canter on a loose rein** – you can even play **Passenger Game** if you have a safe environment to do so. (<https://happyhorsesbitless.com/post/2017/11/01/the-passenger-game>) Focus on keeping your elbows relaxed and shoulders back, *without* managing the horse with the reins. **Challenge yourself to do as little as possible – just follow the horse’s movement.** Feels good? Now practice **with one hand behind your back**, reaching up to help your shoulders roll away from your chest!
- 🐾 **Challenge yourself to ride fifty transitions in fifteen minutes.** If you have to move your reins or legs more than three times for any transition, GAME OVER – start over from zero. Ask someone to film you and you will be able to see if you cheat on any transitions!
- 🐾 Once you’re good at this exercise? **Try it over fences!** Link together your original course, but add circles and transitions between jumps. How many transitions can you ride between the start and finish?
- 🐾 If Chase still seems stiff, **a longer walk** in the warmup might be beneficial. Is it possible for you to go hacking outside the arena before you get to work? Walking and trotting over **raised poles** would also be a good addition to your routine as they’ll encourage him to flex his joints, engage his core and stretch across his back.

### LINKS YOU MIGHT FIND USEFUL:

<https://dressageridertraining.com/blog/dressage-exercises/>

<https://www.horselistening.com/2012/03/24/demystifying-contact-in-horseback-riding/> (plus all the related posts on this topic)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqP5iu2VDNc> (another hand position exercise you can try)

**WANT TO INVEST IN YOUR HORSEY LIBRARY?** *Centered Riding* and *Centered Riding II* by **Sally Swift** both have helpful images and exercises for improving hand position and contact. *55 Corrective Exercises for Horses* by **Jec Aristotle Ballou** has a ton of information and workout routines for improving a horse’s strength and balance.

Hope this keeps you busy for a while! Happy riding, and let me know if you have any questions!

*Nikki*